FOREWORD

Dr. K S Kannan, D.Litt.,
Chair Professor (Retd.),
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras.

Bhārata, known in recent times as India, is a unique phenomenon: the longest continuous civilization known, it delved deep into the vital issues of life, offered practicable solutions millennia ago to intractable problems bedevilling human society even to this day. Current Yoga adherence alone is sufficient to vouch for this; and its votaries numbering millions, and its annual business crossing billions of dollars, but serve as a substantial index to the same. The equally long legacy of language studies, courtesy Pāṇini *et al.*, is of no less significance either.

The Unparalleled Guru

For all the vaunted abundance of yogic investigations, theoretical and practical – especially the scientific, showing itself in thousands of articles in hundreds of journals of high standing – it cannot be easily asserted that the supreme goal of Yoga, as conceived by its progenitors and promulgators, has been fully or very well accomplished.

A first-hand experience of the high yogic states which is foundational, buttressed by a sharp intellect and a sensitive mind, has a vital role to play in such investigations. And it is precisely here that the role of Sriranga Mahaguru (Śrīraṅga Mahāguru) (1913–1969) proves most pertinent.

Born in a traditional family at Hedathale (a village in Karnataka, about 20 miles from Mysore), he had his formal education no more than up till Middle School, yet acquired a decent knowledge of Sanskrit, and a totally independent first-hand experience of a gamut of high Yogic states, which all he could access at will and with ease, and what is more, could impart to deserving seekers.

An enviable polymath, he was a totally self-made master in the theory as well as praxis in multiple fields, not excluding (Carnatic) Classical Music and Ayurvedic medicine. To cap it all, equipped as he was with a natural and irrepressible investigative and scientific proclivity, he introduced such quantitative procedures in Nāḍī-śāstra as could verily effectively blur the boundaries between science on the one hand and religion – Sanātana Dharma, to wit – on the other. He laboured not to author books, but imparted quintessential knowledge in the course of the thousands of conversations he had had with scores of his disciples – only a small fraction of which were put in black and white by just a few of them: yet easily running to well over 4000 pages (published as a series of volumes, all in Kannada, entitled *Amaravāṇi*, 1983–2010), all published by Aṣṭāṅga-yoga-vijñāna-mandiram (AYVM), an institution he founded.

The book that adorns your hands is a very small selection of the same. A bird's eye-view of the same is presented below.

Ten Themes Selected

There are ten chapters in the book. The opening one (**Chapter 1**), entitled "***Maṅgala-dravyas***" deals with what are traditionally considered auspicious substances. Typically, *akṣata* (unbroken rice

usually tinged with turmeric powder) and turmeric twigs, especially dried ones, and *pañca-gavya* (five products issuing from the cow) – are deemed sacred; certain animal products too – such as honey and silk, the hides of the deer and the tiger – are all technically considered pure. Turmeric is even considered an equivalent of gold on certain occasions!

In typical ethnographical accounts, these would be portrayed only as being on par with the numerous superstitions of varied tribes. Even the best of traditional explanations regarding them is little more than that they are sanctioned by the *śāstra*-s, hence sacrosanct. Effectively, no logical justifications are forthcoming, which is why, in this age of emphasis on questioning everything, these religious practices are fast losing their hold on the populace and especially on the younger generations – much to the detriment of the hoary tradition, and more to the jeopardy of the honest seekers of the sublime.

It is as a whiff of fresh air that the methodology devised and developed by Sriranga Mahaguru comes in here. The aspects of repeatability, verifiability, and universality of the experiments and the results thereof, go to reveal the utter scientificity of the Mahāguru's approach.

Chapter 2, "**Gold and Its worth**", explores the issue of the noble metal in its traditional varieties with its dozen names (such as *suvarṇa, hiraṇya, kanaka, kāñcana, śātakumbha, kārtasvara, mahārajata, jāmbūnada, tāpanīya*), along with the justifications for the labels. New insights into the concept of *ābharaṇa* are provided alongside. The physical and spiritual effects of gold are explored bringing out the

yogic impact of the precious metal. Tulasī and its varieties are also considered for their impact on humans; and in a kindred fashion are gems of varied types considered.

The **3rd chapter** called ***Keśālaṅkāra*** deals with the commonplace issue of the Hindu women braiding their hair, and its surprising yogic roots. The triple branches of the plait have their correspondence with the three *nāḍī*-s viz. Iḍā, Piṅgalā, and Suṣumnā. And the serpent-mark ornament stands for Kuṇḍalinī-śakti. Many more yogic subtleties are brought to the fore, and the issue of the utility of these ideas in current times and their practicability – are also raised and discussed.

Chapter 4 (**Puṇḍra on the Forehead**) brings out the significance of the so-called religious marks on the forehead of Hindus – very highly prevalent in the sixties of the last century (the talk was given in 1964), though on a comparatively small scale even now. *Kuṅkuma, bhasma, śrīgandha* are the commonly seen marks, and some of these were, and are, seen ridiculed, as neither their wearer nor the mocker is aware of their origin or significance: Miss Mayo, for example, ignominiously referred to Kuṅkuma as an indication of the menstrual cycle! These marks have a specific place and are worn in a specific way on one's person. To illustrate: the triple lines of the *tiryak-puṇḍra*, the *vibhūti* mark, have a threefold representation: as the three *agni*-s (viz. Dakṣiṇāgni, Gārhapatya, and Āhavanīya); as the three Veda-s (viz. Ṛgveda, Yajurveda, and Sāmaveda); as also the three syllables of Oṅkāra (viz. *akāra, ukāra,* and *makāra*). Similar explanations obtain for the *ūrdhva-puṇḍra* too.

Chapter 5, captioned "**Benediction to the Newly Wed couple and conjugal life**" (talk delivered in 1961), brings out the cordial and cooperative relation that the husband and wife ought to have – for the purpose not only of *dharma-prajā* (dhārmic progeny), but also for the acquisition of *ātma-guṇa*-s, and the attainment of the Supreme Goal of life *via* leading a yājñic life – a life of the performance of the *pañca-mahā-yajña*-s. The very marriage ritual invokes the ideal of the Primordial Couple (viz. Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa), and equally, a life of complementary roles for the husband and wife blending *loka-vyavahāra* and *ātma-vyavahāra* – which is to say, balancing life here and hereafter.

Chapter 6 entitled "**Pilgrimage to Cidambaram – a Prelude**" (dated 1964), is directed towards developing a mental frame that conduces to a really fruitful pilgrimage – conforming, that is, to the original spiritual intent behind the same. Cidambaram refers to the place of the Naṭarāja Temple in Tamil Nadu; but even more importantly to the "inner sky", the *daharākāśa*, wherein *yogin*-s experience the vision of the Lord of Dancers.

Temples are to the inner/spiritual realms what maps are to physical territories.

Chapter 7 is in the form of a dialogue between Sriranga Mahaguru and one of his chief disciples viz. Sri Chayapati, and is titled "**Poetic Composition**". The issue of the role of descriptions in poetry is taken up, and the Mahāguru provides extempore descriptions of a lamp (a mundane theme, after all) – recollect the wick-oil lamps with a glass chimney of the '50s or '60s of the last

century. The description is at once factual as well as imaginative, is embellished with figurative expressions of sound as well as sense (known technically as *śabdālaṅkāra* and *arthālaṅkāra*), and laden with suggestive power (*dhvani*); and what is more, is interspersed with many a spiritual idea. So too with the descriptions of the nose, of an old man etc.

Somewhat surprisingly, the detailed description of the feminine frame, commonly encountered in Sanskrit poetry, is also taken up – discussing the significance, at multiple levels, of the limbs of women in sufficient detail. The Mahāguru then passes on to typical descriptions of Devī, the Mother Goddess, and sheds light on the intentions and implications of such portrayals. The discussion culminates in a comparative analysis of the sextet of *rasa*-s (in cookery) and the nonet of *rasa*-s (in poetry).

Chapter 8 discusses, and is hence entitled, ***Rāga-saṁyojana*** or setting the tune for a text chosen for singing. The participants in the discussion are Sri Gurudasaru and Dr. GR Ganesh Rao, a musician and a physician respectively.

Singing is a mode of communication, and among its first prerequisites are a thorough consideration of its what and how: the theme and the presentation. Further, *saṅgīta* (Hindu music) has a lofty goal (as is exemplified in the song *Mokṣamu galadā* of Sri Tyāgarāja). The Mahāguru gives a demonstration of the different effects of singing a same theme in different *rāga*-s – by reciting a verse of his own. The appeal of the song should, he notes, at once cater not just to the ear, but the mind and the intellect as well.

It comes as a revelation that natural phenomena have *rāga*-s too: the case of the water falling from a tap into a vessel below, and its *rāga*-connections are spelt out. Properly rendered, music can impart varied effects on listeners – whether it is getting a feel of the blooming *kamala,* or perceiving the fragrance of the Tulasī, or experiencing the shade of the Aśvattha tree. And all this is no theory, no speculation, no imagination: all practicals.

And what is more, even Nature can be impacted similarly: the blossoming of a bud may even be accelerated – just by singing! The two disciples respectively mark the changes in their own person – the change in the *svara* experienced, and the change in the Nāḍī readings. The possibilities of imparting *rāga* effects by one's mere sight and touch were also demonstrated. How external conditions affect the singer, and how singing can be instrumental in inducing sleep – were all demonstrated experimentally.

Chapter 9, with the title "**Drawing as an Art**" discusses issues salient to the art. Choosing a verse from *Kṛṣṇakarṇāmṛta*, the Mahāguru refers to a lofty theme therein – a description of Lord Kṛṣṇa – working out the fuller details, and the deeper implications thereof, for a faithful and effective portrayal of the same via the Mohana-*rāga*.

The last one, **Chapter 10**, is entitled "**King and the Kingdom**". It borders on anachronism to dwell today – on the issue of the relationship between the king and the kingdom – at a time when the time-immemorial traditional monarchy has been replaced by democracy. Whatever the present dispensations be, it is by no means

unimportant to know what the scheme and the system was in traditional statecraft that worked well for several millennia in our country. The role of the king is discussed by Kauṭalya, and depicted by Kālidāsa with equal felicity.

The very concepts of Rāṣṭra and Rājya, and even more importantly, the deep significance in the very design of the royal insignia such as the *siṁhāsana* and *kirīṭa* (the throne and the crown), the *daṇḍa* and the *chatra* (the sceptre and the umbrella) are all set forth in an impeccable manner. Where democracy can fail, and for what reason, are also laid bare. The talk concludes with a reference to Bhīṣma's wise words – pointing towards proper *raja-dharma* that bodes happiness to all citizens.

The English Rendering

As was pointed out earlier, the teachings of Sriranga Mahaguru are all in the Kannada language, and it is only recently that they are being rendered into English. We have a rendering here by Dr. CR Ramaswamy, former Head of Nuclear Physics Section, Bangalore University, and a disciple of the Mahāguru, and Secretary, AYVM, Bangalore Branch.

Dr. Ramaswamy has already brought out a few volumes in this direction, all published by AYVM, Bangalore: *Enlightened Exchanges with Śrīraṅga Mahāguru* (2016; 112pp.); *Nectarine Nuggets of Śrīraṅga Mahāguru* (2021; 238pp.): and *Musings of the Mahāguru* (Part 1) (2023; 148pp).

The English rendering by Prof. Ramaswamy is lucid in all these books all through. It is also slightly explanatory where needed, and

does a great service to the readers in capturing the spirit of the original.

Himself a student of science, he is quite sensitive to the scientific handling of the varied themes by the Mahāguru. Sri Ramaswamy has had a very long and steady association with the Mahāguru and the Mandiram, even from his student days, and his commitment to the great cause of disseminating the glorious thoughts of the Mahāguru is unflinching and unflagging.

We wish more ink flows from his illuminating pen, and more readers get an exposure thereby to the deep thoughts of a great mind.